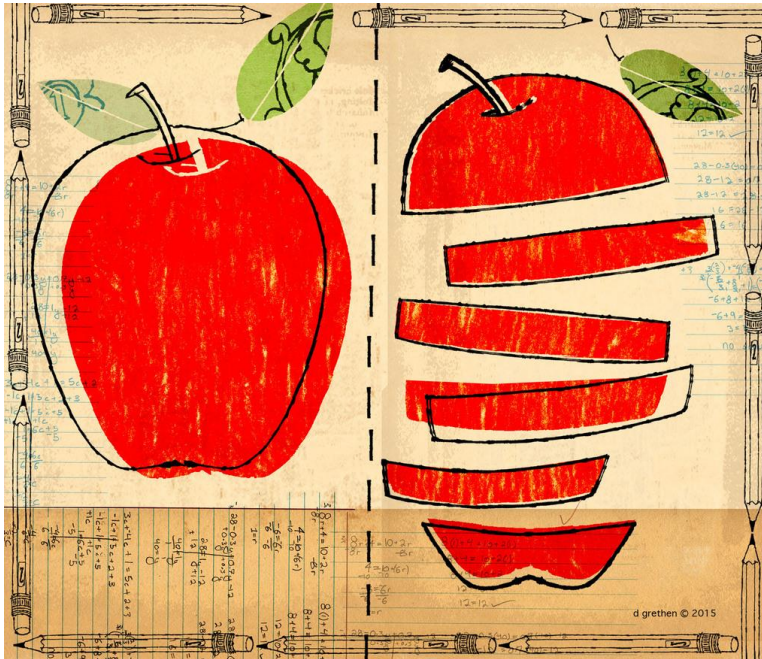


Legislature should not wait for Supreme Court pressure on education funding

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Donna Grethen / Op Art (Donna Grethen)

The Washington Legislature cannot wait for more Supreme Court action before getting its work done on education funding.

By [Seattle Times editorial board](#)

The Seattle Times

AS the state waits for the Washington Supreme Court to decide its next move on public-school funding, the Legislature does not have that luxury.

Although the court's 2012 McCleary ruling has forced change, lawmakers now must lead and make progress on fixing the way the state pays for public schools. They must stop stalling and get a real plan ready before the 2017 legislative session convenes in January.

As state Sen. Christine Rolfes, D-Bainbridge Island, recently told The Seattle Times editorial board, if there's not a solid plan for legislative action on education funding by early December, the Legislature is likely to fail again.

The solutions are all on the table. All that's required is leadership.

Lawmakers from both houses and parties have been meeting regularly to gather information and work out a compromise. The Legislature can and must do this, with or without more help from the Supreme Court.

When the Legislature writes its plan this fall, it should:

- Require results, not just more money for schools. Remember this work is about equity of access to a quality education for more than a million schoolchildren. It's about better academic performance for all students throughout their educational careers, better graduation rates of students who are ready either for college or career training and closing the achievement gap.
- Fix the inequity in local property taxes. Because property values and local-levy rates vary greatly from district to district, some school districts are able to add millions to their budgets through local property taxes while others have very little extra money to add to the state's portion. The Supreme Court called out this unequal system as one of the biggest problems in the state education-funding system. Four years after lawmakers started talking about a property-tax swap — an idea stalled by the governor and others — that work still needs to be done, and now it's even more expensive because of that delay.
- Find ways other than property taxes to fill the estimated \$3.5 billion, two-year funding gap for education. Find new revenue. Lawmakers should consider a capital-gains tax with an exemption for proceeds from the sale of a primary residence. Washington is one of a handful of states without a capital-gains tax.
- Get rid of some business-tax exemptions, instead of just talking about this option. Scrutinize tax breaks for enterprises or industries that do not create jobs or help the economy. In this category might be the sales-tax exemption on bottled water and exemptions on sales taxes for nonresidents.
- Require teachers contracts covering salaries and benefits to be bargained statewide while leaving other decisions to local school boards. Put guard rails around the way some dollars are spent so local districts cannot bargain away money for programs or classroom supplies, for example, and use the money to give staff a sweeter deal than educators are getting in the district next door.
- Help school districts hire great teachers, both in places where the economy is red hot and in cities that find it hard to attract newcomers. Raise the starting salary for teachers.

Lawmakers were elected to do this work. They need to show leadership now and make a difference for Washington's schoolchildren.

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